

LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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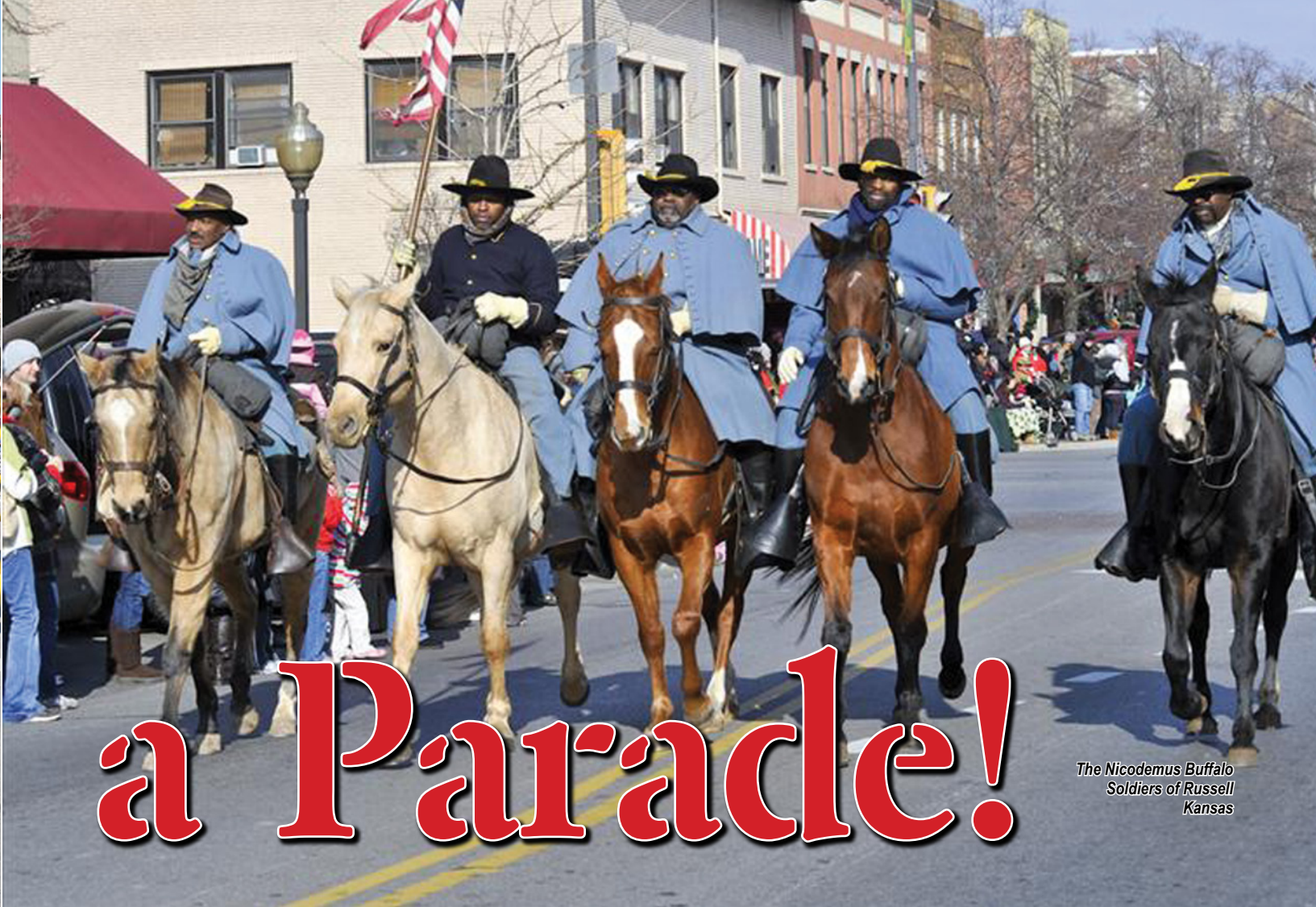
SKILLED TRADES
& APPLIED TECHNOLOGY



Stagecoach owned by Robin Dunn of Dunn's Landing

Let's Have

by Julie DeYoung, photos courtesy Lawrence Christmas Parade



The Nicodemus Buffalo Soldiers of Russell Kansas

a Parade!

Let's Have a Parade! Those words kick off a Lawrence holiday tradition, the Lawrence Old-Fashioned Christmas Parade, held at 11 a.m the first Saturday in December. This year, on Dec. 2, 2023, it will be for 30th anniversary.

Celebrating the role of horses in history as well as the winter holidays, the Lawrence Christmas Parade is one of the few all-horse parades in the country and is believed to be one of the largest and longest-running.

"We are so honored to continue this tradition for its 30th trip down Massachusetts Street. For both participants and spectators, it has become a special time to kick off the Christmas season with family and friends, and it wouldn't be possible without the support of the Lawrence business community, and especially downtown Lawrence," says Marty Kennedy, president of Lawrence Old-Fashioned Christmas Parade Inc., who leads the 501c3 nonprofit board and all-volunteer committee that manages the parade.

THE HISTORY

Originally named "The Eldridge Hotel Old-Fashioned Christmas Parade," this event was the brainchild of Robert W. Phillips, a local businessman and general manager of the (at the time) newly renovated Eldridge Hotel. In 1992, Phillips became involved with driving horses and purchased a team and wagon so he could participate in a wagon train that traveled across Kansas on the historic Oregon Trail. Along the route, people came out to see the wagon train, and as it passed through small towns, it turned into a parade. Phillips was struck by the enthusiasm of the crowds. Thus, the idea of a parade hosted by the Eldridge Hotel was born.

The first parade was pulled together in just a few months and included 21 horse-drawn vehicles traveling down Massachusetts Street with six cowboy outriders to assist. As news of the event spread, the number of entries increased each year, and the crowds who gathered to watch grew dramatically. The parade has hosted as many as 70 horse-powered vehicles paying tribute to the contribution of the horse in our transportation heritage. Crowds numbering in the tens of thousands throng Downtown Lawrence to experience the sounds of hoof beats and sleigh bells as the horses make their way down Mass.

Phillips created 11 rules to guide the parade's development, most of which are honored today. Historically authentic, horse-drawn

vehicles and participants in period or holiday dress are central to the parade, as is providing a dinner the night before and complementary hotel rooms for participants traveling from a distance. Sponsors are invited to the Friday dinner to mingle with the participants, and the public is welcome to visit the 100 or more horses stabled at the Douglas County Fairgrounds overnight.

As the parade has grown, the financial support required for a quality event has increased. The Lawrence business community has stepped up during the years and continues to be the financial foundation today. Major sponsors include the City of Lawrence, eXplore Lawrence, The Chamber, Eldridge Hotel, Kennedy Glass and Standard Beverage, and new in 2022 Laser Logic and media sponsors *Great Plains Media* and *Lawrence Business Magazine*. Friends of the Parade—individual and business sponsors—and in-kind donors provide substantial funding, as well.

In addition to being a meaningful tradition, the parade is an economic driver for the community. "The Lawrence Old-Fashioned Christmas Parade is truly an unmistakable event. It draws in participants from across the country and attracts visitors from surrounding communities. It's a magical way to showcase Lawrence as a destination and share our community," says Kim Anspach, director of eXplore Lawrence.

The event fills hotel rooms during off-peak travel season and generates nearly \$700,000 in economic impact. Sponsors benefit from visibility on the parade website, social media and parade signage and marketing materials.

30TH CELEBRATION

As part of the 30th parade celebration, participants in the original parade will be recognized at the Friday night dinner and during the parade. Organizers expect three of the original participants to have wagons in the parade, and those no longer driving will ride as guests in other participant conveyances.

Bonnie Lowe, president and CEO of The Chamber of Lawrence, says, "The Lawrence Old-Fashioned Christmas Parade has become a quintessential part of celebrating the holiday season in our community. All of us at The Chamber are thrilled to be a partner with Marty, Patty and the team on their 30th year of leading these beautiful horses down Mass Street. We look forward to this year's parade and many more to come!"

For more information about the parade and sponsorship opportunities, visit www.lawrencechristmasparade.org. ▲



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